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Summary of Discussions

This summary of discussions is an abbreviated and highly edited version of the actual general discussion that took place after the presentation of papers and during a period set aside for that purpose. The major points of the discussion revolved around such topics as problems of rice-growing in Malaysia, education and rural development, the problems of generalizing and making comparative studies on the basis of limited village studies, and some anthropological observation on Malay family and community structure; which are to be epitomized in the following.

Education and Rural Development

A point was stressed by a Japanese delegate that the lack of agricultural orientation in Malaysian school curricula was a reflection of the system of school administration which is the responsibility of the Ministry of Education. In Thailand, urban schools are under the Ministry of Education while rural schools are the responsibility of the Ministry of the Interior. Such administrative systems create problems in the integration of educational curricula in rural development programs.

On a participant's query about the system of education in rural Japan and its role in rural development and promoting rural-urban drift, it was explained that the first six years of education is compulsory after which streaming took place into secondary schools, vocational schools or agricultural schools to train better farmers. Some flexibility was allowed to local governments to formulate curricula to suit local conditions; hence, regional variations in school curricula exist.

In regard to the "brain drain", there has been a persistent drift to the urban areas although in absolute numbers, the rural population did not decrease in pre-war Japan. In the post-war period, economic development proceeded at a pace that enhanced rural-urban migration and affected the absolute number of rural dwellers. However, educational curricula in rural schools have emphasized the importance of agriculture and, to some degree, helped in strengthening the bonds of farmers and their children to the land.

In the discussion on this topic, the point was made that, even in 1970, some Malaysian policymakers were conscious of the impending labor shortages during critical periods in the *padi* agricultural cycle. The tendency for rural out-migration was not peculiar to Malaysia; in all developing countries, exposure to education raised the expectations of rural youth and emphasized the menial status of labor involved in agricultural activities, whether in rice-growing or the cultivation of rubber and oil palm. In addition, one of the participants expressed a pointed remark that in the light

of the heavy manual labor involved in rice cultivation, or the gloomy work conditions in rubber or oil palm estates, it was rational for rural youth to choose urban jobs paying the same wage as in the rural areas.

Representativeness and Comparative Studies

In the choice of sample farms interviewed, the question of comparability among sample farms in Malaysian versus Thai villages was brought up. For example, in Padang Lalang and Tanjung Karang, the proportion of landlords in the sample is small while it is larger in the Thai villages surveyed. Such inter-country differences while affecting the comparability of the results, may also, as in Mizuno's paper, affect the classification of villages into ecological groups. To make valid generalizations about ecological differences, certain variables (e.g., farm size, tenurial status, etc.) need to be held constant or be controlled.

A point was also made that it probably was a little too early to attempt cross-cultural studies because of insufficient information currently available. It probably was more relevant to identify intra-regional differences (e.g., within MADA) and their causes before even making intra-country, let alone inter-country comparisons.

An associated point emphasized by another participant is the validity of generalizations extended to a region or community made on the basis of the study of one or few villages. This relates as much to the relevance of micro studies to macro and aggregative studies and their implications to regional and national planning.

The studies presented at the seminar were felt to be more case studies than sample studies, about which more background information was necessary before a careful and analytical comparative study could be made, as for example, in the differential role of school education in the rural development of Thailand and Malaysia.

In rebuttal, the Japanese participants stressed that a major objective in their research project was to identify methodologies to link the micro village studies to national programs. This was done by investigating the general and salient features of agriculture (of which the introduction of HYV's was one) and the choice of villages broadly representative of certain ecological regions. Thus, for Malaysia, Padang Lalang, Tanjung Karang, Kg. Galok and Melaka were considered representative of the major rice-growing areas in Malaysia. Also, these villages had first been surveyed six to ten years ago and so inter-temporal comparisons could also be made alongside international comparisons by the same scholars earlier involved.

One of the Malaysian delegates felt that it was not completely valid to say that meaningful comparative studies could not be undertaken until more case studies were made. The Center for Southeast Asian Studies' researchers had done work over a ten year span and, perhaps it was not fair to say that more time should be spent in research before reporting back their findings.

Problems of Rice-Growing in Malaysia

To the dissatisfaction expressed by one of the Malaysian delegates pertaining to the lack of precision in identifying the problems in Malaysia's rice-growing sector, one administrator actively involved in a rice double-cropping area felt that the dissemination of the modern rice-growing technologies from the artificial conditions of experimental research stations to the farmers was a crucial problem. However, even before technology is disseminated, an accurate survey of an area would determine the most suitable type of technology consistent with its ecology. After this, research stations should program their activities to devising such appropriate technology. Research scientists tended, too often, to have tunnel vision in being crop- or discipline-oriented but not problem-oriented. It was indicated that MARDI is attempting to overcome this problem by dividing Malaysia into homogeneous ecological zones for which the best suited crops could then be recommended and the constraints to this objective identified and acted upon. Thus, for example, MADA farmers are at a stage where high level technology could be developed, introduced and disseminated. Besut in Trengganu, however, contains farmers whose technological requirements are of a level lower than what is required in MADA.

Another delegate pointed out, in agreement with the above observation, that the dissemination of technology to farmers was indeed an obstacle but could be overcome by proper organizational structuring. This could be viewed at two levels. Regarding the bureaucratic organizations to channel inputs and services to the farming community, there appears, in the Malaysian context, a superfluity of such organizations for which coordinative strategies need to be formulated. Secondly, organizations of recipients to receive or to channel to the beneficiaries the new technologies were necessary. In this latter case, what these institutions are or how they should be structured should be the subject of further research.

An opposing view was presented that technology is not the major constraint in rural development in Asia but, as indicated by AAS II (Asian Agricultural Survey II commissioned by the Asian Development Bank), the institutions forming part of the technological transmission network. Planned interventions, whether theoretically in the social sciences or practically in rural Asia, have yet to be rigidly devised to facilitate the institutional changes necessary to disseminate the modern agricultural technologies and ensure an equitable distribution of the gains from growth. The record so far has been that, as in the case of the community development blocks in India, successes have been scattered. These ought to be studied to find the enabling factors responsible for their success. Some methodologies need to be invented to assess the performance of institutions and their role as deterrent or facilitating factors in the diffusion of technology in rural development.

Another speaker on the basis of his research in MADA supported the above viewpoint and stressed that since Malay rice-growing communities are deemed to be non-cohesive, i.e., individual orientations are strong, technological diffusion should not face many problems because no social sanction acts against individual initiatives to adopt technology. In relation to institutional development, farmers' participation in rural development appears an important role that deserves further research. Unfortunately, because organizational or institutional developments are relatively intangible, although their impact is felt in the long term, too great an emphasis has been placed on other, more tangible aspects of rural development.

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